

Young Goat Whiskers (my cousin and neighbor to the west) and our outfit hired a hound dog man this fall. Bobcats had begun to develop a tremendous appetite for our kid goats and baby lambs. Counts in the yearling category were also going down. Considering the multitude of other tolls that were whittling on our flocks, we decided to give the cats at least token opposition.

The bobcat chouser has been working real well. His dogs have scored five times; no telling how many predators their bawling and bellowing have moved to calmer ranges. On top of that, the coons aren't lying around the barns eating cottonseed cake, as they did last year. A few more runs should show the varmints who owns title to the land.

One serious problem has developed. The cat hunter has gone spooky as a cave dweller's nightmare. Out to the job he can climb up medium sized mesquites after a treed cat, but after he goes to bed at night he imagines all sorts of ghosts roaming near the ranch house. Up in New Mexico he made quite a name running bears, but down here the mice stirring in the kitchen keep him upset. He's been keeping dogs in the house to ward off the spooks.

The other morning I got out to the ranch before he'd risen. Hounds started by in baying in the backyard, and what sounded like a pack began baying inside the house. The hunter began shouting, but I couldn't tell what he was saying because of the dog ruckus. From the outside, it sounded as if the hounds had jumped a cat in the bathtub.

Good judgment said to run; however, you hate to retreat on your home grounds. Ranchers have so many enemies in this day and age that it is not advisable to waste your strength running at your own headquarters.

After the dogs calmed, the hunter told me that he hadn't been able to sleep for thinking about the tales he'd been hearing. He explained that his hunting partner of the past weekend had overloaded him with stories of wild people wandering in the darkness.

Counseling a patient in that shape is extremely difficult. Most insomnia today is caused by the tales people tell, instead of the ones they hear. Cow traders and politicians, for example, don't sleep enough to actually afford owning a modest sized bedroll. About the only use they get from sheets and pillows is to cover up their heads to try to blot out memories of the things they told folks the day before. Some of them get rich enough to buy feather beds, but they never do get their money's worth from them.

Doctors have plenty of sleeping potions for hombres suffering nocturnal conscience spells, but they don't have any pills to cure people from suffering from what they hear. I dearly hope that people don't start taking everything they hear to bed with them. Counting the persons doing the telling, we'd have a nation that'd burn up all the electricity in one year, and I don't mean for you to think that they'd burn it up using electric blankets. Serious power shortages could develop if every light in the country was left on all night.

Like I told Young Goat Whiskers on the phone today, we are going to have to hire a companion to stay with our bobcat hunter. We can't afford to let him get so bad that he causes his dogs to be restless, too.

For every good cat dog, you have to pass up about 400 mediocre houndmasters. I wouldn't mind the hunter ruining his health losing sleep, but I sure don't want those dogs to be ruined by their owner's imagination.

Our luck always runs bad. Just as we get to chousing the bobcats a ghost story has to interfere. It's a good thing the Three Wise Men got together during biblical times. It'd take a lot of doing to find that many today.